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Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment: annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Center for Women's Global Leadership, Amnesty International, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer and Women's Environment and Development Organization

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

10-36778 (E) 210610

Please recycle

Statement

The Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign, a network comprised of 310 organizations worldwide, welcomes the themes of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2010 of the Economic and Social Council.

In this historic year of celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995, women's, human rights and social justice groups urge Member States and the United Nations Secretariat to establish the promised gender equality entity as soon as possible. Women have waited long enough and the United Nations must implement changes that are crucial to fulfilling its mandate in working for gender equality and the advancement of women as a critical component of the global agenda for development, human rights and peace and security.

A stronger United Nations entity for women will enable the United Nations and its Member States to better deliver on their numerous commitments to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women and peace and security, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, in addition to many others.

On 14 September 2009, the General Assembly adopted a historic resolution (A/RES/63/311) supporting the consolidation of the four existing United Nations gender equality entities into a composite women's entity, to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General. The GEAR campaign welcomed this resolution, as well as the recent report of the Secretary-General entitled "Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women" (A/64/588), which addresses many of the key issues for the launch of the new women's entity and demands final closure on this issue during the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

We urge Member States to move swiftly on a resolution that will create the gender equality entity by July 2010. The following elements are fundamental to the establishment of the new entity:

- Universal country presence and a strong policy and programmatic mandate to ensure that the entity is the United Nations system's driver for women's empowerment and gender equality.
- Substantial, multi-year core funding and a commitment to a budget of $1 billion, with increases over time.
- Formal mechanisms for meaningful and systematic participation of civil society, particularly women's organizations, in the governance structure of the entity, with civil society advisory bodies at the global, regional and national levels.
- A transparent process to recruit an Under-Secretary-General to head the entity. The ideal candidate should combine a global vision with gender equality expertise in working for women's empowerment on the ground, as well as the ability to secure funding and lead the organizational transition process.

To close the gap in realizing women's rights, the United Nations has recognized the need for a strong, well-resourced coordinated body to be a driver for these goals at the highest levels of leadership, both at Headquarters and in the field. Now is the time to take action and build a United Nations that really works for all women!

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Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment: annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations: HelpAge International, AARP, International Council of Psychologists, International Federation on Ageing, European Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly and International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Implementation of key international commitments and goals on gender inequality in relation to older women

This statement focuses on the extent to which older women and ageing have been taken into account in the implementation of key international commitments and goals on gender inequality. Ageing and discrimination against older women are rarely considered, and it is imperative to respond to the gender implications of population ageing if gender inequality is to be adequately addressed. The statement contains recommendations for action to take this forward.

The century of ageing: The twenty-first century is the century of ageing. Populations are ageing at an unprecedented rate: the proportion of older people is predicted to rise globally from 760 million today (11 per cent of the population) to almost 2 billion by 2050 (22 per cent of the population). By 2045, there will be more people over the age of 60 than children under 15. While already well advanced in some developed countries, population ageing is occurring most rapidly in developing countries.

Women and ageing: While global statistics mask the very different contexts in which older women live, they do serve to illustrate the gendered nature of ageing. More older women than older men live alone; 19 per cent of older women compared to 9 per cent of older men live on their own. Although for some older women, this may be a lifestyle choice, for others, it can lead to isolation and become a barrier to accessing support and services. Similarly, 80 per cent of men over 60 are married compared to only 48 per cent of older women. There are more women living into their 80s and beyond: while there are 83 men for every 100 women at the age of 60, there are only 59 men for every 100 women at the age of 80.

Older women and gender equality: Men and women experience ageing differently. Both experience discrimination based on old age but, for older women, this can be exacerbated by a lifetime of gender-based discrimination, poverty and working in poorly paid jobs, with little access to formal social security to provide a regular income in old age.

Older women are not a homogeneous group: The discrimination older women experience is often intersectional, their old age compounding other forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, levels of poverty or literacy. Often considered no longer economically or reproductively useful, many older women are seen as a burden on their families and communities, and are marginalized, isolated or even abandoned. Despite this, older women's contribution to society — as carers, advisers, mediators and breadwinners — is invaluable.

Older women and the internationally agreed commitments and goals: Demographic ageing is having a profound effect on the society in which we live. Policies across all sectors need to respond to its implications, including those related to gender equality. However, the internationally agreed goals and commitments are largely silent regarding older women and the implementation of those that do address older women has been inconsistent at best.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action addresses older women's poverty, health, the violence perpetrated against them, obstacles to entering the job market, vulnerability in armed conflict, and discrimination at work. However, a review of 121 national responses to a questionnaire for the Beijing+15 review showed patchy and inconsistent recognition of, and attention to, older women. Attention to old women was greatest in descriptions of measures to reduce women's poverty with 30 of the countries including broader information on social security (pensions) and other social protection measures for older women or older people. There was general recognition that women are more at risk of poverty in old age than men, but only five countries provided poverty data that was disaggregated by age and sex. Older women's health was mentioned in only 19 of the responses reviewed. A similar picture emerges on violence against older women. Older women remain invisible in responses to violence against women, with only four countries mentioning violence against older women. Only 11 of the 121 responses reviewed included measures to encourage and support employment of older women, despite the fact that 40 per cent of women over 60 in the least developed countries are in the labour force, the majority of whom are likely to be in the informal sector.

What was particularly noticeable was the lack of data disaggregated by age and sex. Only two countries reviewed recognized the lack of such data as a problem and only one made a commitment to collect it. A questionnaire of this nature cannot cover every Government action aimed at empowering and advancing women. What it does tell us, however, is that older women are a low priority for most countries and that Governments have a long way to go to meet their commitments under Beijing towards older women. Finally, and perhaps most disturbingly, at a time when populations have already aged considerably in some countries and are ageing rapidly in others, only six responses reviewed recognized ageing and its impact on women as a future priority.

Millennium Development Goals: While the Millennium Development Goals have provided an important platform for gathering support from the donor community for development, they are not without their problems. Like the majority of development interventions, the Goals are completely "age-blind". They are also completely silent on the issue of ageing and gender inequality. This is reflected in the way the Goal indicators, against which progress is measured, are not disaggregated by age, for example the poverty and hunger indicators for Goal 1. Others focus on younger people only, for example, HIV prevalence rates only being measured up to the age of 24 in Goal 6. Goals 3 and 5 do little to address the gender inequality that older women experience. If the Millennium Development Goals are to deliver fair and equitable development that reaches the very poorest and takes gender inequality throughout the life course into account, they can no longer ignore the unprecedented demographic change that is presently taking place.

Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008): In terms of gender equality in times of conflict, neither resolution 1325 (2000) nor resolution 1820 (2008) mention older women and their specific vulnerabilities in armed conflict and in relation to sexual violence in war, or their potential contributions to peacebuilding.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: With 186 States parties, the Convention provides commitments on gender

equality that apply to all women regardless of age and throughout their lives, which are legally binding nearly all over the world.

In its decision 26/III (2002) entitled "Ending discrimination against older women through the Convention", the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which monitors the implementation of the Convention, recognized that the Convention is an important tool for addressing the specific issue of the human rights of older women. In particular, the Committee recognized that discrimination against women throughout their lifespan has a severe and compounded impact on women in old age. It recognized the lack of statistical data disaggregated by age and sex, including on the incidence of poverty and violence against older women, and the need to improve older women's economic, physical, mental and social well-being, as well as their participation in society.

Despite this, attention to the rights of older women has been disappointing in both States parties' reports and in the Committee's concluding observations. In the eight years between 1998 and 2006, there were just 33 references to older women in concluding observations. However, this has increased significantly since 2007, with 33 references between 2007 and the conclusion of the first Committee session in 2010. In particular, the ongoing process of drafting a general recommendation on the rights of older women has encouraged the Committee to request information on older women from reporting States parties when none has been given.

When adopted, it is hoped that the general recommendation on older women's rights will outline the obligations assumed by States parties from the perspective of ageing and provide guidance to both State parties and non-governmental organizations on the inclusion of older women's rights in their implementation of and reporting on the Convention.

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002: On its adoption, the Plan of Action was described by Kofi Annan as a bold new agenda for handling the issues of ageing in the twenty-first century, and he noted that it was the first time Governments agreed to link questions of ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights. In the accompanying Political Declaration, Governments recognized the need to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes to take account of the needs and experiences of older women and men. However, as the above analysis of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women shows, there is little evidence of this linking of ageing to frameworks to promote gender equality and social and economic development.

Recommendations: The creation of a new United Nations gender entity, the forthcoming reviews of the Millennium Development Goals and of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and the new general recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women provide opportunities to improve the implementation of international commitments and goals on gender equality in relation to older women:

- An overarching prerequisite is recognition and acceptance that the world is ageing at an unprecedented rate and that this has profound implications in every sector. Improved data disaggregation by age and sex is key to understanding what these implications are and how best to respond to them.

- The setting up of a new United Nations gender entity provides an opportunity to place greater focus on gender and ageing from the outset. Including gender and ageing in the three proposed divisions of the new gender entity at headquarters level (intergovernmental support and strategic partnership, programme and policy, and operations) is also critical to ensure the response of the United Nations to gender inequality reflects changing population structures. This could be done through dedicated staff on gender and ageing. Gender and ageing also need to be taken into account across all the functions of the new entity, and explicit attention needs to be given to gender and ageing in all the intergovernmental agreements that will be monitored by the new gender entity.

- Gender equality must be a key part of the national 10-year reviews of implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, which will culminate in the global review at the Commission for Social Development in 2013.

- Ageing and its gender implications must be central to the review of the Millennium Development Goals and the post-Goal debate to determine a new development paradigm based on human rights, social justice and equality.

- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should systematically ask all reporting States parties to provide information on how they are implementing the Convention in relation to older women.

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Statement submitted by the Women's Federation for World Peace International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Background

The Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) strongly supports the Economic and Social Council commitment to further discussion on the theme of implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women during the 2010 annual ministerial review. Furthermore, WFWPI encourages continual diligence by the Council during its discussions to identify, bring to light and facilitate the dissemination and scale-up of innovations, best practices and proven methods for advancing the status of women in the most difficult circumstances and empowering women wherever they may be and to show leadership in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment goals worldwide. The Millennium Development Goals and the 12 areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action have definite synergies and provide clear benchmarks for the United Nations, Governments and members of civil society in their combined efforts to usher in a new era of empowerment and equality for women around the world.

For over 15 years, WFWPI volunteers have established, nurtured, sustained and expanded grass-roots aid efforts in more than 50 nations worldwide, sustaining efforts that have given rise to schools for both girls and boys, economic development for poor women, including vocational training and microloans for the founding of small businesses and cottage industries, health care and hygiene efforts and more. These international service projects have been undertaken by women of the global North to empower the women of the global South and other poverty-stricken areas. In complement to these international service projects, WFWPI volunteers worldwide have initiated and participated in reconciliation activities known as the Interracial Sisterhood Project "Bridge of Peace", which provides a ceremonial context for women of previously enemy nations or cultures to meet one on one and begin a lasting friendship that recognizes their similarities and puts to rest past enmity or misunderstanding between the two new "sisters".

The recommendations offered in this statement are drawn from the experiences of our women in the field, as well as review of events such as the WFWPI parallel event during the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, entitled "Sharing of good practices to achieve Millennium Development Goal No. 3, promote gender equality and empower women".

Key issues

As we reflect on progress towards fulfilment of the vision behind both the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, it is plain to see that, although progress has been made, there are still many areas in the world where people suffer desperately, with their fundamental needs unmet, including the safety and security that comes with the rule of law, access to enough food, clean water, basic shelter, health care, opportunities for education, vocational training and opportunities for jobs and work that pays a living wage, including opportunities for entrepreneurship. There is a long way to go in order to achieve equality for women in government, institutional and organizational leadership and participation in decision-making at all levels at the United Nations and in both developed and developing countries.

WFWPI proposes that it is precisely through strengthening women's empowerment and improving gender equality that the world will gain access to the significant untapped resources that women have to offer in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the vision articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action and creating a better world for all people.

Models worthy of consideration

By the Charter of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council is strategically placed to continue its work in convening stakeholders and representatives worldwide to face the most pressing economic and social issues and build consensus on policy recommendations to present to the General Assembly. In the light of the fact that the Council is responsible for (a) promoting higher standards of living, full employment and economic and social progress, (b) identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems, (c) facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation and (d) encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, WFWPI offers the following insights and recommendations.

One global human family. The model of the family has relevance in our efforts to implement agreed goals and commitments with regard to gender equality and empowerment of women, whether our role is within the United Nations or as part of a Government or civil society. The model of the family includes the wisdom and seasoned love of grandparents, the sacrificial love and attention of parents and, within the embrace of the family unit, all children as well. This model implies that we seek those wise and compassionate elders among our communities and throughout the world and ask their guidance in facing and overcoming barriers to the achievement of our goals, whether they be tribal elders from aboriginal cultures, wise former statespeople who served their countries well or passionate grass-roots leaders in civil society. Let us also be watchful for those among us who demonstrate parental hearts towards those they serve in the national and international spheres. Let us honour and celebrate these women and men who have sacrificed their own comfort to advocate for and meet the needs of the more vulnerable day in and day out and act in the best interest of others, the way a good parent does for his or her children. If institutions and organizations, whether public or private, can incorporate the wisdom and genuine sacrificial commitment to others that exist in the hearts of the most loving and embracing grandparents and parents, we will have taken a huge stride towards thinking and acting in ways that leave no person behind.

Reconciliation. Because human history has included so much violent conflict — and in recent times this conflict has occurred among communities and neighbours — models of reconciliation are paramount. WFWPI has developed and disseminated the Bridge of Peace Ceremony, held between women and men of previously warring communities or nations. This is a solemn ceremony that allows participants to leave behind wounds and concepts from the past, cross the bridge of peace and meet a new sister (or brother, for men) to put aside differences and embrace one another as family and begin anew in friendship. Hundreds of these ceremonies have been held throughout the world over the last decade and a half to foster forgiveness and understanding and bridge differences across national, cultural or religious chasms.

A Bridge of Peace success story that is of particular note is the birth and continuation of the WFWPI annual Women's Conference for Peace in the Middle East. The thirteenth conference was held in May 2009, with participants from nations throughout the Middle East, to discuss barriers to peace and methods and mechanisms for fostering peace in the Middle East across national, cultural and religious barriers.

The natural feminine instinct towards reconciliation, healing, embrace and collaboration towards the achievement of common goals in spite of differences is a crucial asset in the peace process.

Women's participation in decision-making and leadership. In many cultures and nations, girls and women have been taught to believe that their voice does not count, that they are not meant to participate in the public sphere or that they are not allowed to participate by virtue of their gender. To reverse the hold on women, young and old, that this viewpoint has had, girls and women need deliberate training and education that changes this view and self-image. Girls and women must be educated so that they realize not just that they have the right to participate in decision-making and leadership, but also that what they have to offer is crucial to achieving the internationally agreed goals and commitments regarding gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, girls and women must be taught how to participate and how to advocate for their concerns to be addressed and their problems faced. WFWPI advocates for continued efforts that empower women, including leadership training that equips women to serve as leaders in civil society or teaches them how to run for and serve in public office. In addition, WFWPI volunteers work at the grass-roots level to provide education for girls and women which helps to strengthen their self-image and facilitates self-empowerment.

More can be done at the United Nations, international and national levels to strengthen and enforce laws that protect the basic human rights of women and establish quotas for women's participation in decision-making at all levels, as well as create mechanisms for accountability towards such quotas.

Women and sustainable development. The issue of women and sustainable development is a complex one. Although sustainable development implies economic development that entails acceptable levels of global resource depletion and environmental pollution, it is obvious that, unless women are at the table for decision-making and policymaking about this issue, they are largely left to cope with the results of less-than-sustainable approaches that occur as a result of government and corporate decisions that sacrifice sustainability for short-term gain.

A contribution that non-governmental organizations such as WFWPI can and do make to this issue at the grass-roots level is to incorporate models of sustainable practice into aid projects that involve economic development. For instance, in an agricultural project that has the goal of giving a community a hand up, volunteers can teach crop rotation, concepts of organic agriculture and basic hygiene, building a holistic approach for a community of beneficiaries, such as the WFWPI partnership with the United Nations Development Programme to assist a community in western Kenya several years ago.

The dignity of women. WFWPI chapters in Europe have invested considerable resources in education and awareness-raising regarding the need to elevate respect for the basic dignity of women in the face of continued media

objectification of women and serious problems such as the scourge of trafficking in women for sexual purposes. The focus of this effort is not just women, but also men and boys. Education about the dignity of women improves the self-image of women and girls and also helps men and boys to understand women's fundamental value. A deeper appreciation of the dignity of women empowers women to assert themselves in decision-making processes at all levels, from within their homes to policymaking at the national and international levels. When women are held in higher esteem in their families and communities, this translates to a greater degree of respect and consideration. Although laws may change in support of women's equality and empowerment, without a cultural shift towards respect for the fundamental value of women, equality and empowerment cannot occur.

Proposed new United Nations gender entity. From an organizational standpoint, one of the most important ways that the Economic and Social Council can support the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women is to support the formation, implementation and funding by the General Assembly of the proposed new United Nations gender entity. The gender entity will streamline and consolidate the work of the United Nations system towards gender equality and empowerment of women by bringing the offices and agencies of the United Nations that focus on the advancement of women into one and placing its leadership at the Secretariat level. The gender entity will facilitate the acceleration of progress towards the achievement of gender equality throughout the world. This streamlining will add efficiencies through the consolidation of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and collaboration with Member States, as well as civil society.

Conclusion

In connection with the 2010 annual ministerial review held during the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, WFWPI recommends continued reflection on and embrace of the vision that we are all members of one human family, which implies the importance of utilizing the best and deepest wisdom we have to offer, a genuine sense of caring for one another that should be nurtured and acted upon, along with practical implementation. WFWPI urges the Council to continue and amplify its efforts to partner with civil society and leverage lessons learned and best practices discovered.